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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000383

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2020
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: PRT NAJAF: DEADLY EXPLOSIONS ROCK KUFA

REF: BAGHDAD 0111

Classified By: Classified By: PRT Najaf Team Leader Angus Simmons for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a Najaf Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) reporting cable.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: Three nearly simultaneous bombings occurred in Najaf province February 12 as the roads were crowded with pilgrims preparing to attend observances for the end of the Arba'in holiday and commemoration of the Prophet Mohammad,s death. Najaf had enjoyed nearly thirty days of relative calm since the January 14 bombings that killed two Iraqi civilians. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) On February 12, as Najaf's roads were crowded with pilgrims preparing to attend observances for the anniversary of the death of the Prophet, an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) detonated near a security check point in Kufa on the road to Hillah. A second IED detonated near a gas station in located in Kufa City, and a third IED exploded at a market near the Kufa Mosque. One media report suggested this was a female suicide bomber at a nearby restaurant. (NOTE: A fourth blast reported by local media in the early evening was determined to be a defective electrical transformer and was, in fact, not an IED. END NOTE). According to officials at Al Sadr Hospital, the blasts killed four and wounded another forty individuals.

¶4. (C) U.S. Forces stood by ready to assist with Explosive Ordinance Demolition and Quick Response Forces teams, however Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) did not request assistance. (Note: Unmanned Aerial Surveillance (UAS) and Apache helicopter support was provided. END NOTE.) PRT Team Leader spoke with both Governor Zurfi (Da'wa) and the Provincial Council Chair Sheikh Fayed al-Sharmari (SoL) to express condolences.

Sadrism Trend blames U.S., Al-Qaeda and Ba'athists for Bombings

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¶5. (SBU) The bombings occurred in the Sadrism Trend stronghold of Kufa. Local internet media outlet Al Sadr Online reported that First Deputy Governor Razaq Sharef (Sadrism Trend) blamed "occupation (U.S.) forces, Al-Qaeda (AQI), and Ba'athists for jointly executing the bombings." ¶6. (C) Comment: No organization has taken responsibility for the bombings, however, it would be no surprise if provincial officials continue to make assertions or accusations blaming Ba'athists as occurred with the January 14 bombings which left at least two dead and seventy-three wounded (reftel). In the Shi'a heartland, fear and determination to keep Ba'athists from returning to political life are the politics of the day. Even Provincial Governor Zurfi participated in a

rally against Ba'athists, as he realized that this is good politics for Shi'as of any political stripe. The prevailing sentiment on the street appears to lay blame for these attacks on the Ba,ath and Saddam sympathizers. End Comment.
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